

**c. Pre-Post Assessment**

**1. Introduction.**

Starting in late April, my Harlem Renaissance unit spans six weeks of an Ingraham high school language arts course. On average, I'll be teaching it four days a week, with the fifth day devoted to an ongoing personal anthology project introduced by my cooperating teacher in February. I'll be teaching my unit to two "regular" (non-IB track) 10th grade classes of a highly diverse mixture of students. The unit will follow a unit on Macbeth, but harks back to their winter unit on a Harlem-set novel *Scorpions*.

During this unit, the students will study the poetry, short fiction and prose of the era, with particular emphasis on Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and James Baldwin. Students will learn about the artistic, historical and cultural context of these works, and about the creative interplay among the various art forms that thrived during this era. Students will come to know what makes the era's literature distinct, and they'll understand the important influence of jazz and blues on the era's poetry. Finally, because many of my diverse students seem highly unmotivated in their current language course, I will strive to instill an appreciation for the era's diversity of voices and its uniqueness in the American literary tradition.

## **2. Purpose of the assessment.**

As described by Richard J. Stiggins in *Student-Involved Assessments FOR Learning*, assessments can provide data about student learning that will inform teachers, school professionals, the community at-large and the state, and the students themselves. In light of these principles, my pre-post assessment has the purpose of providing evidence of (1) how well I've taught my students what I've intended to teach them, indicating what adjustments I should make in my methods; (2) a "positive impact on student learning," a state requirement for certification; and (3) how much my students have learned over the course of my unit, giving them feedback on the value of their efforts.

The purpose of the pre-test is to establish how much the students already understand about the concepts I'll be teaching them in my Harlem Renaissance unit. In addition, I'll attempt to measure specific dispositions they have toward the Harlem Renaissance. The purpose of the post-test will be to measure their understanding and dispositions in these same areas, establishing the extent to which they've learned. The data that the pre-post assessment yields will not only inform me whether my teaching methods were effective, but it will also demonstrate to the students what learning their efforts have yielded in my classroom. Finally, the data will inform me (and the state) whether my students have benefited from my instruction, substantiating that I've made that "positive impact on student learning."

### 3. Unit-level targets:

- Concept: Students will understand the infusion of Southern experience and sensibilities into the Harlem arts milieu. (*History 1.2.3 Identify and analyze major concepts, people, and events in 20th century U.S. History*)
- Concept: Students will understand the embodiment of African American experience in distinctive forms of expression. (*Reading 3.4.2: Evaluate traditional and contemporary literature written in a variety of genres.*)
- Concept: Students will understand the influence of musical art forms on Harlem Renaissance poetry. (*Arts 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze the connection among the arts disciplines.*)
- Concept: Students will understand the mutual influence of artists working in different art forms. (*Arts 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze the connection among the arts disciplines.*)
- Disposition: Students will appreciate the diversity of voices in this African American arts movement.
- Disposition: Students will appreciate the uniqueness of this period in American intellectual and art history.

#### 4. Instruments.

I'm planning to use the same instruments for both my pre-test and post-test. (See attached instruments.) This will allow me to make a direct comparison of what they know before the unit and what they know afterward. I'm using one instrument for my conceptual targets and another instrument for my dispositional targets. I will give the students the pre-test on the day before the Harlem Renaissance unit begins, when I am introducing my whole six-week course. For control purposes, I'll allow the students thirty minutes for the pre-test, but I doubt they'll need that much time. I'll give them the post-test the day after the unit ends and again allow them a full thirty minutes.

**Conceptual targets.** To assess my four conceptual learning targets, I used an "ovals of knowledge" tool. In this assessment, I ask the students to write "any names, ideas, and thoughts" they have about the Harlem Renaissance that relate to the labels. Each of the labels is effectively short-hand for one of the conceptual targets. I tried to make the labels stand for a central idea without becoming too wordy. My intention is that they will act as a prompt for eliciting all that they know about the four concepts that serve as unit-level learning targets.

The "ovals of knowledge" are short-answer assessments. Short-answer assessments are appropriate because they enable the teacher to infer the students' level of knowledge from their responses to the prompts.

**Dispositional targets.** To assess my two dispositional learning targets, I used as a prompt a question that asks the students what they know that's special about the Harlem Renaissance era. Both of my dispositional learning targets are aimed at the students having an appreciation for distinguishing features of the Harlem Renaissance. The question is phrased with the intention of eliciting from the students their appreciation for what distinguishes the Harlem Renaissance movement from other eras.

The dispositional question is a short-answer assessment. Short-answer assessments are appropriate because they enable the teacher to infer student attitudes from their responses to the prompt.

##### **5. Bias and distortion.**

There are a number of reasons why these short-answer tests might not provide accurate measurements of how much my students have learned in my unit. For starters, I might not have provided enough detail in my "ovals of knowledge" labels; if the labels are too vague or too loosely tied to my conceptual targets, they may not elicit what the students actually know.

Another problem is that I might underestimate what they know before the unit and overestimate what they know after the unit. My expectations may cause me to evaluate the test results in a biased way. Another possible problem is that my questions might not be phrased simply enough. If so, students with

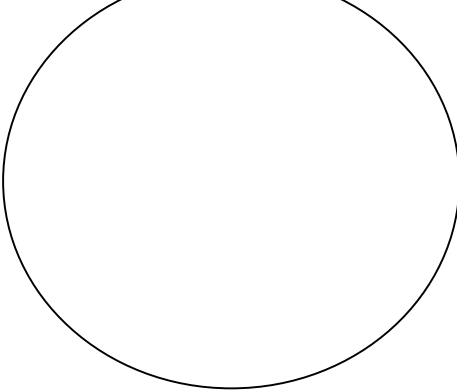
reading difficulties may misunderstand what I'm asking for and fail to display what they actually know. Another concern is that my tests involved written responses. Students who have displayed their knowledge more proficiently in discussions or group presentations may not find this method the best way to demonstrate their knowledge. Finally, the tests will come at a time when the students are undergoing transitions. Their dispositions could affect test results in a biased fashion.

The pre-test and post-test for the disposition targets present particular difficulties that deserve a separate paragraph. The dispositional targets for my unit are very specific because I assumed that it would be more realistic to try to teach dispositions about specific ideas rather than general ideas. However, the dispositional question is phrased in general way. I wanted the question to elicit enough of a response to infer their attitudes about two distinguishing features of the Harlem Renaissance. However, if the question is too general, it may not elicit responses that address my areas of concern. I may learn something about what they thought or felt about the Harlem Renaissance, but I might not learn about the two aspects for which I was seeking evidence. Finally, I'll be asking dispositional questions during times of transition, when the students might be distracted. As I state above, this could affect test results in a biased fashion.

In the ovals below, please write any names, ideas, and thoughts you have about the Harlem Renaissance that relate to the labels of the ovals.

This is not a test! It's okay to leave the ovals blank.

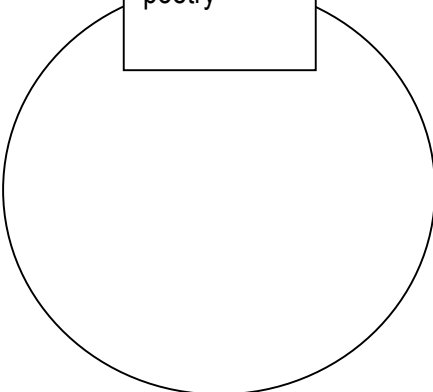
Southern  
experience



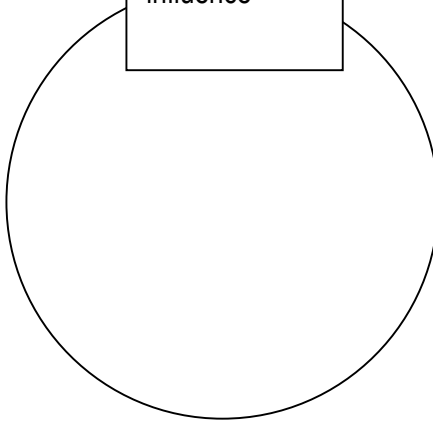
African  
American  
expression



Music and  
poetry



Mutual  
influence



Please answer the following question with as much detail as you can provide. This is not a test! It's okay to say, "No, I don't know anything about it."

**Do you know anything about the Harlem Renaissance that makes it a special era in our history?**